A Brief History of the Western Australian Homelessness Service System Pre-1985 to 2012

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In the nearly 30 years we have worked in the homelessness sector we have seen many changes to the way homeless services are planned, delivered and measured in Western Australia (WA). We have seen huge changes in the way homelessness is perceived by the general public and in the range of people who become homeless. We have also seen massive changes to the housing system which has inevitably affected the availability of housing, the client groups seeking assistance and the type of support services required.

Pre SAAP

Prior to 1985 homeless services were supported through a range of Commonwealth and State funding initiatives. The major programs were the Homeless Persons Assistance Program, Domestic Violence services and women’s refuge funding and Youth Services Assistance Program.

On 17 November 1983 a review was tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament that recommended that, following negotiations with States and Territories and consultations with women’s and youth groups, Aboriginal organisations and service providers for other homeless people, all Commonwealth crisis accommodation programs should be brought together under a single Act of Parliament. The review recommended that this Act provide funding to the States and Territories, embody a five year Commonwealth-State agreement, and be accompanied by the establishment of Commonwealth-State co-ordinating committees which would also include representatives of relevant non-government organisations.

The aims of the program were: Firstly, to provide improved and more equitable funding of approved services, to fund new services in areas of high need, and to move towards improved wages and conditions for workers; secondly, to move progressively during the program to improve the assessment of the need for services, and to distribute funds on the basis of improved assessment within each state and territory; and thirdly, to facilitate the involvement of service providers in advising on program needs and priorities. (1)

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program – the joint Commonwealth/State initiative pulled a number of disparate responses under one flagship program. While single men’s services and youth services were generally accepting of the concept, domestic violence services were not. They viewed their service response as linked to the Women’s Rights agenda – not as a response to homelessness. Refuge workers demonstrated, but the new SAAP still went ahead.

A number of homeless men’s services and day centres were “excluded” on the basis that the Commonwealth funding was too low and to include them in the program would require significant State Government investment.

SAAP I 1985-89

In 1985/6 the Commonwealth and States/Territories established the first Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) Agreement (SAAP I). In WA SAAP provided funding for 58 services across three program areas; youth, women (DV) and general with a program budget of $6.2 million per annum.

At the same time as the SAAP was established so too was the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) “A parallel programme providing capital grants for crisis accommodation.” (2) In WA the SAAP was administered by the Department for Community Services (currently Department for Child
Protection, DCP) and CAP by Homeswest, (currently the Department of Housing). To this day, homelessness operating funding and capital funding are administered in separate departments requiring good interagency working relationships.

Initially, the program commenced with the ideal of a genuine partnership where government and non government agencies would jointly recommend funding decisions to Ministers. The programme was managed by a SAAP/CAP Co-ordinating Committee with three Sub-Programme Committees.

The Co-ordinating Committee had membership from each sub-programme area, Commonwealth and State Departments for Community Services, Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction, and Homeswest and was chaired by a member of the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS). The sub- programmes were:

- Women’s Emergency Services Sub-Programme (WESP), with membership of all funded service providers.
- General Sub-Programme (GSAAP), with membership elected from those agencies providing accommodation and support services via the Council for Homeless Persons.
- Youth Sub-Programme (YSAAP), with membership from a field via the Youth Accommodation Coalition of WA.

The role of the Sub-Programme Committees was to establish policy and funding priorities for each specific Sub-Program.

The need to accurately describe the program and monitor service use resulted in two major national collections. In 1987-88 a one night census collection was held to collect client characteristics and needs information and a two week collection monitored the level of use and demand for services. In January 1988, a national evaluation of the programme was completed. The report “Homes Away From Home” by Colleen Chesterman recognised the achievements of the programme and made recommendations for SAAP II including:

- the abandonment of the legislative acknowledgement of the sub-programmes, WESP, GSAAP and YSAAP;  
- the identification and focussing on the needs of various target groups; and  
- emphasising the transitional nature of the programme. (3)

SAAP I focussed on the provision of short term crisis accommodation such as night shelters and refuges and was characterised by collective decision making by Government and non-Government services with final funding approval resting with the Commonwealth Minister.

SAAP II 1989-95
Following the Chesterman evaluation, the Commonwealth and States agreed that “a joint, cost-shared program to assist the homeless should continue”. (4) Key elements that remained the hallmark of the programme were put in place, including dollar for dollar matching of all new funding and a level of indexation.

The agreement stipulated a new requirement for three year service agreements which would contain nationally consistent core provisions including target group, service policy and objectives, conduct of service, user rights and participation, access to disadvantaged groups, service evaluation and provision of data.
Administrative arrangements were refined to streamline approval processes. These included revised advisory processes, service reviews and a requirement for State Plans.

State advisory arrangements were changed to a Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) with membership of State and Commonwealth Government Officers, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and an independent chairperson; and a Joint Officers Group (JOG) of State and Commonwealth Government Officers.

The MAC provided advice to Commonwealth and State Ministers and approved the work of the JOG which was to develop State Plans, needs based planning, funding priorities (service type, target groups and localities) and accountability measures, service standards and performance indicators, data needs and evaluation measures.

The first Western Australian SAAP/CAP State Plan was for 1989-91. Some of the highlights of that first report are:

- A budget of $10.24 million in 1988/89, nearly double the first SAAP budget of 1985. This provided funding for 79 services, increased from 58, including 11 new country services.
- Commonwealth funding for CAP funding increased each year from $1.135 million in 1984/5 to $3.7 million in 1989/90.
- establishment of base minimum salary and oncost levels and minimum levels for 24 hour youth crisis services and single men’s service.
- An estimated 900 people per night accommodated in SAAP services.

A key change in SAAP II was the move towards more medium, longer term and ‘exit point’ services to break the cycle of dependency on short term crisis accommodation, and many of the new services and funding increases were for this purpose.

In June 1989 a special council meeting of Social Welfare Ministers met to consider the Human Rights Commission Report on Homeless Children – The Burdekin Report. As a result additional funding was provided to expand medium and longer term accommodation and support services for young people, develop culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal young people, and improve current services through staff training.

Funding of $1 million per annum was provided under a new program the Youth Social Justice Strategy, referred to as “Burdekin funding”, which was closely aligned but separate from SAAP. In WA, 13 new services were funded, six of which were in country locations. These range from services in country locations for Aboriginal at risk youth to long term accommodation options in the metropolitan area.

The Youth Social Justice Strategy funding was rolled into SAAP from 1 July 1995 and service funding made recurrent. The majority of the original Burdekin services are still operating.

**SAAP II** Improved administrative and reporting arrangements and expanded the focus of the programme towards more medium, longer term and ‘exit point’ services to break the cycle of dependency on short term crisis.

**SAAP III 1995-2000**

The SAAP II Agreement was due to expire June 1994 but was extended to June 1995 to allow the Commonwealth and State to negotiate the new Agreement and to allow for the new Supported Accommodation Assistance Act to become law.
With a Labor Government at the Commonwealth level and a Liberal Government at WA State level, negotiations around the new Agreement were tense with WA and a number of other states refusing to sign until a number of matters were agreed, including streamlining administrative procedures to enable State Governments to make funding decisions based on agreed plans. While negotiations continued the Commonwealth had no mechanism to release payments and WA received no Commonwealth funds for six months until the Agreement was finally signed on 7 December 1995.

The State Government ensured that all services were funded and the program continued as normal. Payment from the Commonwealth was made retrospectively in January 1996.

SAAP III saw further changes to the administration of SAAP and the development of service delivery.

Through the Bilateral Agreement with the Commonwealth, Western Australia was the only State to negotiate and gain additional flexibility to manage SAAP III. The Western Australian SAAP Agreement had an attached Joint Approvals Framework, which enabled the State Minister to approve funding allocations within an agreed planning framework. The Western Australian initiative in 1995 has enabled the States and Territories to seek further flexibility as the new directions for the next phase of the program unfold.

A Joint Project Approvals Framework was agreed. The Commonwealth no longer approved the funding of every SAAP service and project. Instead a three year rolling State SAAP Plan would be developed between the Commonwealth and State setting priorities, including new services for the coming year. Only changes to services outside of the State Plan would require joint Ministerial approval.

The MAC was no longer a requirement, however WA chose to continue with a Ministerial advisory mechanism and the establishment of the SAAP State Advisory Committee (SAAP SAC) was endorsed by the Cabinet of Western Australia on 15 May 1995. The Joint Officers Group was no longer required.

Some of the other key changes were:

- the introduction of the SAAP National Co-ordination and Development Committee (CAD)
- the introduction of a National Data Collection;
- a national approach to case management
- the development of service standards and funding of support projects to assist services to implement them.

The first State Plan under SAAP III 1995-96 to 1997-98 recorded annual funding of $15.7 million to 109 services as at April 1996.

In 1996 the SAAP SAC embarked on a state-wide consultation with the sector to seek feedback on the plan and develop the 1996-99 plan. Teams consisting of a SAAP SAC member and a Departmental officer visited six country locations and held four metropolitan workshops. Following this a full day workshop was held with representatives from each area and sector peaks, as well as six SAAP SAC members to collate feedback and develop recommendations. This resulted in the following new initiatives:

- development of an induction training program for SAAP staff
- development of interdepartmental protocols.
In December 1997 the Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing (CASH) Award WA was implemented in WA. The Department funded the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) to assist SAAP services to address the CASH award. The State and Commonwealth contributed additional funds to meet the costs of implementing the Award and by 1999 total funding increases of $5.8 Million per annum had been provided to SAAP services.

By June 2000 SAAP funding in WA had increased to $23.6 million per annum for 119 services.

The National Evaluation (6) of SAAP III noted a number of areas for further development and set priorities around those areas that required more attention.

The focus of SAAP III was on developing the sector, improving the quality of service provision, and measuring client characteristics and needs.

**SAAP IV 2000-05**

In SAAP IV and program priorities were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed in principle between Community Services Ministers at a Commonwealth and State/Territory level. The MOU provided for four Strategic Themes:

- Client Focussed Service Delivery
- Integration and Collaboration between SAAP and other Service Systems
- Increasing Performance, Knowledge and Skills
- Working Together.

Administrative arrangements were further devolved to the States, the Commonwealth Minister no longer required to approve new services. A National Strategic Plan would set a work program and evaluation and reporting framework. The State would be responsible for administer the program at the State level and could ensure that services are funded to meet State priorities.

Administrative data on funded services was now provided via the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which operated the National Data Collection. Ministerial advice was provided to the State Minister by the SAAP State Advisory Committee consisting of Government and sector representatives with an independent Chair.

In 2000 the GST was introduced with increased complexities in financial administration for government and services alike. In recognition of increased costs and the potential for increase demand, the Commonwealth provided an increase to the funding base that did not require dollar for dollar matching.

The WA State Homelessness Strategy 2002-06 *Putting People First* proposed a shift in emphasis from the provision of crisis services to services designed to break the cycle of homelessness.

The WA Government injected an additional $32 Million over four years into innovative services; including:

- Nine private tenancy support services, five metropolitan, three country and one for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people in the metropolitan area.
- Two specialist financial counselling services for young people.
- Three services, one metro-wide and two country, to assist for young people leaving State care.
• Increased services to assist homeless children in country domestic violence services, and in services for homeless families; and support for young parents living in transitional youth accommodation services.

Following and evaluation of the Strategy in 2006, most of the funded services were rolled into SAAP V.

SAAP IV included a focus on preventing homelessness and continued to focus on skilling the sector through provision of training, improving service delivery through monitoring of standards and developing links with other mainstream agencies via the protocols.

SAAP V 2005-09
Administrative and reporting arrangements continued as for SAAP IV. The fifth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP V) Multilateral Agreement commenced on 1 October 2005. The Bilateral SAAP IV Agreement was due to expire 30 June 2005 however it was extended 30 September 2005.

The annual funding at the commencement of SAAP V was $29.6 million. In July 2006 the WA Government provided additional funding to SAAP services of 10% on the State component of SAAP to assist with service viability.

The key driver of sector reform in SAAP V was the Innovation and Investment Fund with $4.8 million funding over four years ($1.3 million per annum) provided jointly by the Commonwealth and WA Governments.

Following expression of interest ten projects were funded to address three Strategic Priorities of SAAP V:

• Early Intervention and prevention
• Multiple support needs and linkages
• Post Crisis Transition

The initiatives were tasked with “doing things differently” to achieve better client outcomes. Evaluation of the initiatives was planned from the beginning and a key aspect of each was the inclusion of Action Research into service model.

Two evaluations were conducted, a general evaluation of the whole strategy by Paul Flatau and Anne Coleman, and evaluation of the Family and Domestic Violence Early Intervention Pilot Outreach Projects, by Dr Colleen Fisher, Dr Moira O’Connor, Dr Andrew Guilfoyle, July 2008.

Learnings and findings from these pilot projects were pivotal in the development of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) initiatives.

SAAP V focussed on innovation, trialling new ways of working and learning from action research and evaluation.

NAHA 2009+
The COAG Intergovernmental Agreement on new Federal Financial Arrangements saw a rationalisation of Specific Purpose Payments. The creation of the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) incorporated the former Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. This locked in base funding for the State without the need for joint decision making.
The fifth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Multilateral Agreement (SAAP V) ceased on 31 December 2008. Services previously funded under SAAP were now funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement which commenced on 1 January 2009. Annual Commonwealth/State base funding was $34.8 million.

In 2012 the Western Australian Government provided an additional $4 million per year to address viability of homelessness services (NAHA and NPAH), representing a 15 percent increase on the state component of funding.

In 2012-13 as 117 services are funded via NAHA services for a total of $45.8 million
The Western Australian Council on Homelessness was established to advise the Minister on issues related to homelessness.

The White Paper on Homelessness, “The Road Home”, was launched in December 2008, by the Commonwealth Government and outlined a national approach to reducing homelessness. Through the Council of Australian Governments process the Commonwealth and States have agreed to an additional $800 million over four years for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). WA received $135 million over four years for capital and operational costs.

The NPAH was closely aligned with the White Paper and centred on three core strategies:

- prevent homelessness and intervene early so that fewer people become homelessness
- break the cycle of homelessness so fewer people remain or re-enter homelessness
- connecting the service system.

In WA 81 new services were funded through the NPAH to deliver programs addressing the core strategies. A number of the WA NPAH initiatives are described in articles in this issue of Parity.

The WA Auditor General has conducted an audit on WA’s implementation of the NPAH. The report was tabled in the State Parliament on Wednesday 25 October 2012, and was largely positive, noting that the NPAH initiatives had made a positive difference for homeless people. However, the report also noted that ongoing uncertainty over the future of the Agreement risks a loss of service delivery capacity and cutting short support for homeless people.

**A Final Word**
At the time of writing, October 2012 WA is once again at a funding crossroads. Uncertainty over the future of NPAH funding post June 2013 is of great concern.
In response to the Auditor General’s report the WA Department of Premier and Cabinet noted “the OAG’s concern around the uncertainty of the programs funded under the Agreement continuing after June 2013. Despite repeated requests, the Commonwealth Government has not yet engaged in negotiations to extend or renew the Agreement”. (7)
## Summary: how the homeless programs in Western Australia have changed since the 1980s

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<th>Program Name</th>
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<td>Prior to SAAP Pre 1985</td>
<td>$6.2 million</td>
<td>A range of separately funded programs.</td>
<td>Fixing immediate crises</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliament Hansard The Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1985</td>
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<td>SAAP III 1995-2000</td>
<td>$15.7 million</td>
<td>Joint Project Approvals Framework SAAP State Advisory Committee Three Year rolling State Plans</td>
<td>developing the sector improving the quality of service provision, measuring client characteristics and needs</td>
<td>National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, National Evaluation Team April 1999</td>
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<td>SAAP IV 2000-05</td>
<td>$23.6 million</td>
<td>Funding approvals by State Minister only. SAAP State Advisory Committee</td>
<td>State Homelessness Strategy Preventing homelessness Breaking the cycle</td>
<td>Western Australian State Homelessness Plan 2002-06</td>
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<td>National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP IV), Erbus Consulting Partners, May 2004</td>
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<td>SAAP V 2005-09</td>
<td>Funding approvals by State Minister only.</td>
<td>The (evaluation of) SAAP V Innovation and Investment Fund Strategy in Western Australia, Paul Flatau and Anne Coleman 2008</td>
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<td>SAAP State Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>National Affordable Housing Agreement</td>
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<td>National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness</td>
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**Footnotes**

2. Source: Briefing note to Minister for Community Services on the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme written by Genevieve Errey on 6 March 1986.
3. Western Australian Plan 1989-91 Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme, Crisis Accommodation Programme
4. Letter from Hon Peter Staples MP Minister for Housing and Aged Care to The Hon Kay Hallahan MLC, Minister for Community Services 3 November 1988
6. Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia, Report 13, October 2012
7. Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia, Report 13, October 2012